

July 5, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Independence Day
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Psalm 37.

1. How do you feel about America celebrating another birthday?
2. What do you think of the recent Supreme Court ruling regarding gay marriage?
3. What does it mean to fret, and are you guilty?
4. What is the right response when it appears that evildoers are prospering?

TRUST IN THE LORD
Psalm 37:1-7

Last week Pat and I attended a fireworks display in honor of America's veterans and members of the armed forces. It was our first celebration of the year of our nation's birthday. As you might expect, there were some patriotic songs playing. I heard the old familiar refrain,

God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

I thought to myself, "I remember that America. But that is not true of America anymore." Things have changed. We are no longer a culture who experiences God's blessing because we are a nation chaffing under God's wrath.

The thought occurred to me in that setting that America is like a decrepit old man. He has lived through too many birthdays. I thought of my own aging condition. I remember vividly the good old days when I could play basketball for hours and then go to Sunday evening service and never fall asleep. There was a day when I could play with my sons who were decades younger than me, and I kept up with them no matter what they wanted to try. I remember the day when I never took a pill of any kind, and I never used to get up in the middle of the night. Those were the good old days. At this age, I am incapable of repeating those past experiences.

Likewise, America was once a far different culture than it is today. I try to imagine the exuberant energy of those early pilgrims as they were establishing a new society in which every person was not only free to worship God but expected to worship God. I think of those founding fathers who, even 150 years after the first pilgrims landed, still held the Bible and God and pastors and churches in high esteem. They appealed to the authority of God in all our founding documents, and etched God's word in the new buildings they built, as they established one nation under God. I think of times even as late as the early twentieth century when revivals swept through the land, Christian colleges were built and thriving, and being committed to church was both expected and respected. Those were the days when our society sent thousands of missionaries all over the world to tell the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

That was the young man named America. He has fallen on hard times as of late. Like me, he is showing the effects of sin. My body is wearing out because of the sin principle. And America has abandoned God who blessed our forefathers because of the sin principle. Therefore, we are not at all what we once were. And all the minions of wickedness rejoice and celebrate assuring each other that this is a most wonderful state of affairs.

Now it is as Malcolm Muggeridge predicted in a speech he gave in 1985 titled *The True Crisis of Our Time*.

". . . So the final conclusion would surely be that whereas other civilizations have been brought down by attacks of barbarians from without, ours had the unique distinction of training its own destroyers at its own educational institutions, and then providing them with facilities for propagating their destructive ideology far and wide, all

at the public expense. Thus did Western Man decide to abolish himself, creating his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own vulnerability out of his own strength, his own impotence out of his own erotomania, himself blowing the trumpet that brought the walls of his own city tumbling down, and having convinced himself that he was too numerous, labored with pill and scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer. Until at last, having educated himself into imbecility, and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he heeled over – a weary, battered old brontosaurus – and became extinct.”

Now in the midst of that very sad ending, we stand by and watch as our dear old Uncle Sam struggles through the last days of his life, succumbing to the cancer of humanistic socialism.

Against that backdrop it is easy and almost expected that we will fret. “How did this happen?” we wonder. “Where did God go?” “Why doesn’t God do something if this is really His nation?” “Why do the wicked prosper?” Those are the kinds of questions David asked. God was gracious to David and answered his questions by reminding him that He, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, is in control for His own glory. Regardless of the unraveling and dismantling of what we think was a wonderful society, God is still God. He is our God and our Father. He loves us and will bring glory to Himself even through the foolishness of wicked people.

Evildoers Do Evil (v.1, 7).

We are caught up in an ideological war (v.1). Our text states that the enemy is characterized by evildoing. God’s command in light of this battle is, *Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!* (v.1). Surely the politically correct people of our society will recoil today with broad brush stroke. “Who says that certain people are evildoers or wrongdoers?” Actually, the One who creates all people and sustains all things identifies some people as evildoers.

The Bible repeatedly and plainly describes the bane of people who chose to live outside the parameters that honor our Creator. Here the word *evildoers* refers to a person who is bad or displeasing. That makes sense. But more specifically this form of the word speaks of

a person whose “badness” causes injury to others. Oh sure, but let’s not forget that what is bad to you might not be bad to someone else.

God helps us on that argument by juxtaposing this word with the Hebrews word that describes good things, pleasing things, that which honors God our Creator. That is why Moses set the choice before God’s people before they entered the Promise Land. He warned them, “*If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them. I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess*” (Deuteronomy 30:16-18).

Therefore, God defines evildoing as it is in conflict with His desires for His glory and holiness. That was the choice from the beginning. God warned our original parents, *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). Eve chose not to trust God and ate the fruit. Adam chose not to trust God and joined her. Now because of our parents’ failure to trust God, we must choose between being evildoers or doers of good.

The word translated *wrongdoers* in this text gives the same picture. These people are notorious for doing what is unrighteous. Again, God sets the standard of righteousness and these people reject it. More precisely, this word is defined quite strongly by the sense of injustice. Anyone who lives contrary to God’s righteousness will also be guilty of holding to, preferring, or enforcing injustice.

Therefore, it becomes obvious that evildoers know what is right but chose to reject truth in spite of their knowledge. Is that really a fair accusation? How can we expect evildoers to know what is right? The Bible teaches that everyone knows certain truths about God because God reveals truth in creation. Paul argued in his letter to the Christians in Rome, *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly*

perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).

According to this argument, evildoers know who God is and what He is like. It is easy to assume they are ignorant of such things, but they are not. But rather than submit to truth, these people intentionally attempt to suppress what they know. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Romans 1:18).* This is why the error of evolution is one of their key doctrines by which they seek to indoctrinate each generation of children. The teaching of evolution is one of the boldest expressions of evildoers pressing down the truth they know and fear.

Second, evildoers know what God expects because God has written His law on their conscience. Paul's second argument in this vein is, *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Romans 2:14-15).* This principle explains why so many of our laws reflect God's law as it appears in the Bible. Until a person sears his conscience through persistent sin and deception, he must frequently reject the truth of God's law as it speaks to him. People choose to do the wrong thing and make wrong decisions in spite of the fact that they have a general knowledge of right and wrong in their conscience.

Paul's third argument is that evildoers actually know what God requires because God gave us His Word. He argued, *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, "That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged" (Romans 3:1-4).*

God has graciously given to humanity, through the Jews, His words. The English word *oracles (logion)* speaks of the divine utterances of God. His Word, the Bible, describes God's character, records His actions, states His promises, His purposes, His desires so that we are all without excuse.

Therefore, because God has revealed the truth and principles about Himself in creation, in the conscience, and in the written Bible, evildoers know who God is. They know what He is like. Therefore, they know what God requires and must then realize that they are guilty of offending Him. That is why people who know what is right in their conscience, but who wish to reject it, do everything in their power to suppress the reading, hearing, teaching, and living of the Bible. They hate to be reminded of what they know to be true.

There are consequences to rejecting God's truth. First, there are the natural consequences of sin that can be summed up in the single word *death*. When we reject the truth God has revealed to us, it causes the death of our relationship with our Creator. But that rejection of truth also causes spiritual death which makes it impossible for us to comprehend the things we know the Bible reveals. A common argument of the evildoer is that the Bible doesn't make sense. Then there is the unavoidable physical death and the process of dying. The process of dying because we have rejected God's truth can accurately describe whole cultures.

A second consequence to rejecting the truth God has revealed is the receiving of His wrath. God reveals that He pours out His wrath as He shows His displeasure against those who reject Him. As a result, we who believe God and trust His Word are uneasy living among people like this. But worse is the fact that we know that we also have to suffer the effects of God pouring out his wrath against such evildoers and wrongdoers.

Listen to God's rule for evildoers stated in Romans 1:21-32: *(21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (26) For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; (27) and the men likewise gave up natural*

relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (28) And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. (29) They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (32) Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Now in light of that reality, try to understand why David, and we who are like him, struggled. In spite of the fact that the wrongdoer lives under God's wrath, it appears that the wicked prosper. David warned us, *Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! (v.7d).*

This principle of the evildoers prospering is obvious in individuals. Probably that was David's first application. We know individuals who are evildoers but who do very well socially and financially . . . for now.

This principle is also obvious in whole cultures as they turn against God's truth. An example that is fresh in our minds is the legalization of gay marriage. We know beyond question that God identifies this lifestyle as evildoing. And yet all the evidence shows that it is being celebrated in our culture. The news reveals that the supporters of evildoing are the winners and, therefore, they are the happy people.

Actually, the American culture is a "Johnny come lately" on this matter. To date, twenty nations have legalized gay marriage. In our hemisphere, we have joined Canada, Greenland, Iceland and Brazil who had already institutionalized gay marriage. Germany and the former Soviet block nations are the notable exceptions of societies that have not institutionalized this particular sin in the eastern hemisphere for now.

Another example is the prospering of the legalization of abortion. God also identifies this practice as evildoing. But it is the expected norm in many of the world cultures. To date, 26% of the

world's nations have permitted abortion for any reason. Another 34% allow abortion with restrictions. That amounts to 60% of the world societies that allow abortion on some level.

We should not be surprised that the American culture is finally catching up with the popularity of evildoing worldwide. As you enter the Supreme Court building, where unelected judges determine how the American people shall live, you will pass beneath the reminder for "Equal Justice Under Law" carved above the west portico. Inside the building are various carvings depicting significant lawgivers throughout history. These figures oversee, as it were, the proceedings of the justices. We do well to remember that this is a fairly modern building, having been completed in 1935.

Among the figures found in these revered buildings are Moses and Solomon. That sounds like a good start. Would that all our laws reflected the heart for God that Moses and Solomon had. But we also find figures like Menes, an ancient Egyptian pharaoh from about 5,000 BC who worshiped false gods. There is a carving of Hammurabi (1750's BC) who was the first king of the Babylonian empire whose law is supposedly the model for Moses' law. There is a statue of Confucius (550's BC), the Chinese founder of the humanistic religion by his name that focuses only on the temporal things and denies other worldly existence. There is even a statue of Mohammed (AD 650's), the founder of Islam. And then there is Charlemagne (AD 814), and Charles the Great who founded Germany and France, who taxed the heart and soul out of the citizens.

If these are the model lawgivers, why would we expect our justices to render verdicts based on the Bible? Menes, Hammurabi, Confucius, Mohammed were worshipers of non-gods. They were men who rejected their Creator, men who led their world into the error of eternal punishment. And men like that are our examples of "Equal Justice Under Law"? What can we expect? Oh, but they were leaders who became famous. Yes, they all seemed to prosper as do the wicked people and evildoers of our society.

It does seem clear that evildoers are able to carry out their devices now in America with virtually no resistance. That is because the evildoers own the news reporting so that citizens can only learn their side of the story. Evildoers own the entire education system from K-4 through post graduate work so they are able to indoctrinate

toward error and falsehood all future generations. Evildoers always have been and always will be of their father the devil who is a liar and the father of lies. And to that end, evildoers will continue their father's work and it appears no one can stop them.

What is to be the response of people who love God? Are we going to fret? Are we going to get angry? Are we going to fight?

God's People Trust Him (vv.2-6).

The simplest statement that describes a right response from us is, "Trust in the LORD." In a word, that is what it means for us to do right. We do not do evil like evildoers do, and we should even stop fretting about their evil-doing. *Fret not yourself (v.1a)*. Fretting is like getting a fire started. It comes from a word that means to burn. Therefore, it pictures us burning in our souls with anger in response to evildoers.

Okay, let's be honest. Who among us has not felt this way in the past few days? I caught myself praying for God to do something spectacular to judge evildoers. I'm thinking earthquakes or terrorist attacks or individual heart attacks. That is because I didn't put out the fire like God expects me to do. Our souls ought to be stirred with holy wrath against anything that offends God. But we must put out the fire before it burns us up. How?

We begin to counteract fretting by being still. *Be still before the LORD (v.7a)*. To be still according to the Hebrew word used here is to be dumbstruck, unable to respond. It is how the leaders of Jerusalem felt in response to Nebuchadnezzar razing their city, killing their families, and destroying God's temple. *The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth (Lamentations 2:10a)*. Be honest – it is very difficult to respond to evil in this way. That is true, until we realize that we do remain silent in the presence of our LORD. Who is your God? What is He like? What can He do? Will He keep His word? Wait in silence.

In fact, we are to respond to evildoers by waiting patiently for God. David told us to be quiet, *and wait patiently for Him (v.7b)*; God knows what is going on. Vengeance is His, He will repay. We "sons of thunder" who are wont to call down fire from heaven against

evildoers struggle to practice this part of God's will. Patiently waiting, expecting God to act, is generally not a human forte.

While we wait patiently, we must keep trusting. *Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness (v.3)*. If we are trusting God, we are leaning fully and completely on the truth of the Bible. But notice that such full dependence requires that we are doing something. If we only sit silently and do nothing, it is an indication we have conceded to evil. A fatalistic attitude is not God's will nor does it honor Him. We are to trust God so much that we are busy doing the thing that reflects God's glory. That is quite different from doing something because we are burning in our souls. That kind of response is often regrettable.

Rather, we are to be doing good while we keep on living among the evildoers. We are to be tenaciously faithful to righteousness for God's glory.

We just keep living for God's glory because we rest completely in God. We are resting because we trust God to deal with the wicked. *For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb (v.2)*. Notice that this promise does not say that we are to cut down the evildoers like grass. That is God's job, and we believe He has done it and will do it.

Consider this example. In 1973, seven of the nine Supreme Court justices decided that all mothers in America have the constitutional right to end the lives of their babies even if the child was only a matter of inconvenience. Since that time, mothers have elected to kill approximately 56,650,000 children. Did God respond to those evildoers? Where was the withering? Well, what did happen to the architects of this wicked scheme? Exactly what God promised. God cut them off and they soon faded like the grass that is thrown into the fire.

Harry Blackmun (who wrote the majority opinion) died April 4, 1999. William Brennan died July 24, 1997. Lewis Powell Jr. died August 25, 1998. Thurgood Marshall died January 24, 1993. Warren Burger died June 25, 1995. William Douglas died January 1, 1980. Potter Stevens died December 7, 1985. If these real men did not repent of their sins, and there is no record indicating they did, if they did not confess their offense against their Creator, and there is no record that any of them did, if they did not by faith embrace the blood

of Jesus Christ as the payment for their sins, they have been suffering in the agony of hell for an average of about twenty years. To think in terms of Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus, these men have been begging God for twenty years to send someone to their families to warn them not to come to the place of torment. Isn't it interesting that God was most patient with the justice who wrote the majority's opinion? Blackmum was the last of the group to die.

Don't burn with anger, but trust God to keep His Word. Rather, delight in the LORD. *Delight yourself in the LORD (v.4a)*. This is an imperative, a command. It reminds us that we are responsible to be delighted with God. It requires us to stay focused on God. When we try to delight ourselves with the things of this world, we will be distraught. Rather we must be delighted with God, His Word, His promises, because He is eternal.

God's response to us when we delight ourselves in Him is that He will reward our desires. God promised, *and he will give you the desires of your heart (v.4)*. Generally, we get this backward by delighting in passing things and then accusing God of not giving us our desires. Delight your heart in God and He will make you more godly—which is the desire of your heart.

Finally, we must respond to evildoers by committing our way to the LORD. *Commit your way to the LORD (5a)*. This means that we must govern our way, but we cannot govern the way of others. We have no power to change the hearts of evildoers. But we are responsible to keep our way in line with God's way. Then when a conflict arises, we just continue to stay committed to God's way. For example, when the authorities told the apostles that it was illegal to preach about Jesus Christ, *Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20)*.

As we are committed to God's way, we are able to trust that God will act. We will *(v.5b) trust in him and he will act. (6) He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday*. Believe that God is busy pouring out His wrath against sin right now. Vengeance against evil is not our path of righteousness. Being committed to God's truth is our path to walk and in so doing, God will bring glory to Himself through our righteousness. We

cannot be responsible for the actions of evildoers. We are responsible for how we react to their actions.